



Ghadar Jari Hai

The Revolt Continues

VOL. II NO. 3 JULY - SEPTEMBER 2008 ■ For private circulation only ■ Contribution Rs 25/-



Modernising Modernity

All opinions expressed in this issue are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views held by the publisher. Any part of this issue may be translated or reprinted with due acknowledgement to Ghadar Jari Hai.

Cover: Panju Ganguli

Address all your editorial correspondence to: S Raghavan,
Email: jaarihai@yahoo.co.in

Printed and published by K. Madhusudhan, on behalf of Lok Awaz Publishers & Distributors.

Printed at:

New Print Cottage, B-74, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-2,
New Delhi-110 020

Published at: E-392, Sanjay Colony, Okhla Phase-II, New Delhi- 110 020

Editor:

S Raghavan

Layout and Design:

Surkhray Kaur, Santosh, Anand

Editorial Policy

Ghadar Jari Hai is dedicated as a platform for discussing Indian solutions to problems facing India. It is focused on understanding Indian history, philosophy, economy and politics without the jaundiced eye of Eurocentrism.

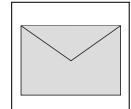
All serious views, of whatever hue, are welcome as long as the author substantiates his or her argument and does not indulge in labeling, name calling and ridicule. We are particularly interested in unraveling pre-British India and the changes brought about through British rule, since the colonial legacy continues to bear great significance for present-day Indian society. We believe that no shade of opinion has a monopoly over the truth and that if we all collaborate in this endeavour, we are quite capable of arriving at insights and solutions to our problems, much as our ancestors did. We seek to publish well researched articles in various fields, which at the same time are communicative and do not indulge in excessive technical jargon.

Contents



Editorial

3



Letters to the Editor

4



Cover Story

Modernising Modernity

Shivanand Kanavi

5



Peepul Ke Neeche Conversations

Reconstructing the Past

Ravindra S Bisht

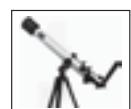
10



Events

Resonances

13



Perspectives

Uttiramerur: Village Polity in Medieval Tamil Nadu

T. S. Sankaran

16

Tirukkural

Padma Sankaran

17



Sanskriti

1857 Ek Safarnama: A Worm's Eye View

Shivanand Kanavi

18



Jewels of India

Tukaram

Girish Bhave

19

Contents

**Book Review**

Visionaries of 1857

Prakash Rao

21

**Study**

Agrarian Relations during the Chola Period-I

S. Raghavan

22

**Pages of History**

Tipu Sultan: A Profile

Surkhraj Kaur, S. Udayan

25



Editorial

We are happy to bring the fifth issue of *Ghadar Jari Hai* to our readers. We have now entered our second year of publication. In the first four issues the focus had been on the Ghadar of 1857, in honour of the 150th anniversary of that historic milestone in the political life of South Asia. From this issue, we have expanded the canvas of our coverage to research into other periods of Indian history.

India is said to have entered the “modern” age and today’s economic, social and political systems are being characterised as being in tune with this transformation. Shivanand, in his cover story, questions this paradigm of modernity, pointing to the grinding poverty and extreme inequity that stare us in the face today. Going beyond the esoteric or the chronological meaning of modernity, he exposes the hollow modernity of today’s economic and political system, rooted in Eurocentric thought. His persuasive essay explains that the way to create a modern society is to renew the rich heritage of Indian thought – Indian history, economics, philosophy and politics – and adapt it, along with the lessons of socialism in the twentieth century, to create a modern society.

The interview of Ravindra Singh Bisht, a well-known historian and field archaeologist, tries to unravel the mystery of Harappan culture, a sophisticated civilisation with no known literature on the one hand and that of the vast Vedic literature with no archaeological evidence to locate its chronology and evolution.

The study on “Agrarian relations during the Chola period” by Raghavan looks at agrarian relations in a fertile region of South India (falling in present day Tamil Nadu) about 1000 years ago. This study assumes contemporary importance in the context of ongoing controversies over the acquisition of agricultural land for industry and other private businesses today. It explores the past to suggest lessons for the present. It is being serialised in two parts.

Our magazine will be featuring a few more sections from this issue onwards. In the “Sanskriti” section, Shivanand presents a review of the play “1857 Ek Safarnama:

A Worm’s Eye View” directed by the well known theatre personality, Nadira Zaheer Babbar.

Girish Bhave passionately portrays, in the “Jewels of India” section, the life and works of Tukaram, the great poet of the Bhakti movement who hailed from present day Maharashtra.

S. Udayan and Surkhraj Kaur paint a portrait of Tipu Sultan, an enlightened and indomitable patriot from the 18th century, in the section “Pages from History”.

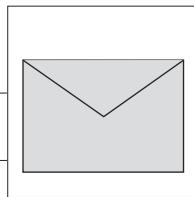
Padma Sankaran explains with a lucid style the significance of Tirukkural, one of the most important ancient literary works, composed before the Common Era.

In the “Book Review” section, Prakash reviews the recently published work of Smita Pandey titled “Vision of the Rebels During 1857: Aspects of Mobilisation, Organisation and Resistance”, an absorbing work which throws fresh light on the different aspects of the Great Ghadar of 1857.

The engrossing article by T. S. Sankaran brings out the significance of the Uttiramerur excavations, which revealed the rich heritage of village democracy in medieval Tamil Nadu.

We are glad to include three more distinguished members as our Editorial Advisors. Shri C. A. Balasubramanian, former Additional Controller General of Accounts, Government of India and an expert in economic analysis; Shri K. Parthasarathy, a frequent commentator on political affairs and one of the editors of Kannada magazine “Hosathu”; and Dr. Ravindra Singh Bisht, former Jt Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India and a distinguished archaeologist and Sanskrit scholar.

Our appeal for subscriptions and life membership has found resonance among our well wishers in India and abroad. We urge those readers who have not yet sent in their financial support to this venture to do so expeditiously.



Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I would like to congratulate the team of Ghadar Jari Hai for putting together an excellent collection of articles and papers again. After reading the first three issues of Ghadar Jari Hai, it has become like an addiction and I await the publication of the next issue.

The cover story was very informative and provided enormous ammunition in defense of our natural resources and their ownership by the people as a whole. I was particularly inspired by two article in this issue – Peepul ke Neeche and perspective on Harappan engineering and its legacy.

It was heartening to know that there are political forces that take the issue of history, philosophy, culture and statecraft seriously and beyond the day-to-day politicking and deal making that one sees around these days, where the only concern of the political parties is to somehow grab and retain power in their own hands. I agree with the approach outlined in the interaction that all political forces in India have the right as well as duty to reflect upon all these aspects so that the stranglehold of euro-centrism can be broken. It is important and obligatory to involve all in this debate. Some of them may use it for their own ends in supporting the status quo. Eventually the theory and philosophy that provides solution to present day problems and opens up path for progress of the society, is the one that will prevail.

Perspective on Harappan engineering clearly demonstrates the achievements in the field of engineering, architecture and town planning. The fact that this was done on such a large scale covering huge tracts of land, show that the society was highly organised and possessed skills and resources to achieve such feats. This again refutes the claim made by the colonisers that the people they conquered were uncivilised and uneducated.

Pravin R
New Delhi

Dear Editor,

I am an avid reader of Ghadar Jari Hai magazine and in fact have been reading it from the very beginning when it started circulating last year. I wanted to congratulate you on a wonderful and intellectually stimulating magazine and at the same time tell you how much I enjoy the Resonances section.

I wanted to share with you, that I was in Kolkata recently and attended the Ghadar Jari Hai event there. It was such a good celebration with dance and very good talks. I hope you will continue to have more such events and keep us informed. I congratulate you once more on this wonderful magazine, it will be in my reading list as long as you bring it out and I hope you will continue to for very long. Keep this Ghadar going!

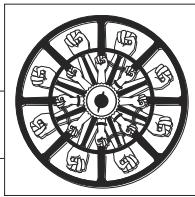
Regards
Seema Jha

Dear Editor,

I am a student of Mumbai University. And I came across your magazine from one of the seminars organised by the social department. I liked the first issue so much that I took the entire year's subscription of your magazine. The ideas and the fact mentioned and propagated by the magazine strike the right chord. So many of my illusions about how British ruled India and the so called freedom fighters got cleared.

I came across so many facts after reading the articles. I was ignorant of the facts all this while that because of only few people we have got the freedom. There were so many unspoken heroes. I really salute you for bringing out the reality. Keep up the good work. And you people have truly made me understand the real meaning of Ghadar.

Yours truly
Shalini Shukla



Cover Story

Modernising Modernity

Modernity has connoted in the minds of people many socially progressive things. However, what we have today is an Indian version of European capitalism and the Westminster style parliamentary system, both of which stand greatly discredited. So where do we look next to solve Indian problems, asks Shivanand Kanavi

What does being modern mean, or what is modernity, is a question worth investigating, because the word 'modern' is used very often to characterise the political, social and economic system we have today. Here we are not looking into the esoteric and often contradictory sense in which the word 'modern' is used in literary, artistic and architectural contexts. In these areas it is difficult to find a reasonably coherent, agreed upon definition of the term 'modern'. In this essay we are concerned with the way the term 'modern' is used in social, political and economic fields.

First of all, we see that 'modern' is not used in a purely chronological sense. In almost all cases 'modern' is used as a value judgement; something 'modern' is to be aspired for and even fought for. It is mostly used to signify something that would be more socially progressive, less hierarchical, less discriminatory, more democratic, more equitable, something that would reduce human drudgery so that the mind and body can be free to pursue more intellectually and physically satisfying pursuits than merely the struggle for *roti, kapada and makaan*.

Soon after independence, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru called for ushering India into the modern era. He called the large industrial complexes, dams and other technological complexes as 'temples of modern India'. The underlying sentiment was that the traditional temples of India were places where faith was primary. However, in these new temples

of modern India, rationality, science and technology would be primary. Heavy industry, IITs, IIMs, space and nuclear programmes, state funded industrial research laboratories, were all started. We are seeing the results in this century.

Nehru and his colleagues in the Congress led the new elite into going along with the installation of Westminster style parliamentary democracy in India by British colonialism. To some it appeared promising compared to the quality of governance under crony Maharajas under British rule. After the transfer of power in 1947, the Indian elite developed the present-day Indian multi-party democracy with a new republican constitution and elections based on universal adult franchise, which is repeatedly hailed as the world's largest, modern, vibrant democracy.

In India, we may not have reached the heights and speeds of Chinese construction, but we have created the Indian big businessman. He is becoming known all over the world for his appetite to build global corporations through mergers and acquisitions, cut mega financial deals in global stock markets and grow in personal wealth.

The Nehruvian project of 'modernisation' in the socio-economic and political sense thus seems to have succeeded. Then one may ask, why is there a need to redefine modernity?

In satellite remote sensing technology, one gets an image of the earth from the skies but before one interprets the picture based on certain assumptions, one needs to go to

the areas photographed by the satellite and check the condition on the ground. In space technology jargon this is called finding the “ground truth”. Thus as we come down from the macro picture of GDP growth, and shining examples of technology and industry to the ground truth, we are struck by the fact that nearly 66 percent of people in India, that is 70 crores have the capacity to spend less than Rs 20 a day. At the same time, according to the *Financial Express*, the total wealth of India's billionaires stands at \$334.6 billion (Rs 14,38,780 crore).

India is planning to send a rocket to the moon next year. Named Chandrayaan-1, it is a great achievement by our space scientists, who work with shoe string budgets. At the same time, a large number of India's children are malnourished and have no decent education. Millions of our people cannot afford good health care even though Indian doctors are dazzling the world with their brilliance in dealing with stem cells, genetics and so on.

These facts are known to ground-ed Indians and do not need belabouring.

The progress and modernisation achieved in India during the 20th century and especially after independence, have been significant but highly iniquitous

In short, the progress and modernisation achieved in India during the 20th century and especially after independence, have been significant but highly iniquitous. One could argue that not only have they fallen far short of expectations and promises but have actually created an unprecedented gulf and polarisation. They have been achieved by a small section that has cornered both the natural resources and the treasury of the government.

This necessitates a re-examination of the paradigm of modernity.

The concept of modernity adopted by India's elite is European in origin. There were many attempts in Europe to make a radical departure from the clutches of the dark Middle Ages. The Europe of those days was characterised by religious wars, religious persecution, persecution of dissenters, inquisition, witch hunts, oppression of the mass of peasants and artisans by feudal lords, the church and the monarchy and so on. The rise of Humanism, the Protestant Reformation, the counter reformation within Catholics, Deism, demands for the separation of church and state, the rise of national churches instead of an imperial Papacy, the demand for religious freedom, agnosticism, mechanistic views of the universe, the rise of modern French materialism, the empirical and experimental approach to science and so on, were different aspects of this struggle.

This represented the ‘new’, the renaissance (rebirth), the modern. This entire course of events took several centuries to develop. At the end of this tortuous process, full of twists and turns, one saw the emergence of capitalism and colonialism as preponderant symbiotic systems. The foundations of capitalism and colo-

nialism were the new property relations which held private ownership rights of individuals as sacrosanct and envisaged a society based on social contract between individuals and the state. The state itself was a ruthless defender of capitalist private property and at the same time a mediator and mitigator of conflict between the owners of these property rights. This was also termed the “civil society” and the “rule of law”.

The 17th and 18th century also saw the increasing use of machinery and technology in production along with division of labour and purely wage based relationships between owners and workers. The great land grab in the Americas and Australia, along with the straight forward loot and plunder of riches from India and other places, not to forget the slave trade from Africa, funded the European industrialisation. It was also accompanied by evictions and pauperisation of millions of peasants and artisans in Europe. They were left to fend for themselves. Later, legends were fabricated on how thrift, merit and hard work led various families to become great property owners, so that the dispossessed would emulate their example instead of taking to rebellion.

This is how capitalism took birth and slowly came to dominate the economy and society.

In India, the British administrators saw that clear private property rights did not exist. The king had the right to collect taxes, while the village communities and adivasi communities managed a portion of the lands and forests. The British conqueror proceeded to claim ‘the power of eminent domain’, which did not have a precedent in India, and established colonial ownership of land and forests. They also privatised

cultivated land and extracted exorbitant revenues through Zamindari and other systems. Cornwallis and his colleagues claimed that the introduction of private ownership would 'modernise' and stimulate the Indian economy.

The situation was summed up very well by Titumir and Dudu Mian of East Bengal in the first half of the 19th century. They organised a large peasant rebellion against the East India Company and its Zamindars. They claimed, "the land belongs to God, we peasants are all children of God. It is our privilege to enjoy its fruits and it is our duty to look after it. Who are the Firangis and these Zamindars to appear on the scene now and claim ownership of the same?"

It is said by some that Capitalism with its individualism brought in the concept of individual 'rights'. However, what is forgotten is a small detail that capitalism is founded on private property rights and hence treats all those without property as outlaws or at least outcasts. If you are a landless peasant in a village or a landless villager who migrates to the city in search of livelihood and builds a jhuggi to protect his family from the elements, only to be treated as an illegal encroacher of land, then you would understand the place of the propertyless in this 'civil society' governed by 'the rule of law'. The only right that is given as a palliative to cover up the rule of the oligarchs is the highly circumscribed right to vote. The rest of the rights are not within your reach unless you become at least a petty proprietor. The petty proprietor himself sees the real limit of his rights whenever he raises any 'lawful' or just demand that might slightly inconvenience the oligarchs.

All this is done within very ra-

Science, technology and reason are all harnessed to maximise the profits of the oligarchs. Thus, you end up with 53 billionaires in India owning Rs 14,38,780 crore while 70 crore Indians cannot spend more than Rs 20 a day

tional and noble frameworks of 'fundamental rights', and 'natural law', which then rub salt in the wound by declaring that all human beings are born equal. A society claiming to give universal rights has no obligation to enable its members to live and work as human beings. Each one is supposed to fend for himself. If a dispossessed person finds others like himself and forms a brotherhood to claim his share of the social product, then attempts are made to suppress them or, if that fails, to co-opt a few 'representatives' of the dispossessed into the establishment.

Of course the use of division of labour and machinery leads to greater mass production for the market place. All are welcome to partake of these products, provided they pay the price set by the market. They are also told that now they have a 'choice'! If at any time the profits of the oligarchs are under a squeeze, then the state wakes up to its primary duty. It comes to the oligarchy's rescue, at the cost of further misery to the millions.

Science, technology and reason

are all harnessed to maximise the profits of the oligarchs. Thus, you end up with 53 billionaires in India owning Rs 14,38,780 crore while 70 crore Indians cannot spend more than Rs 20 a day. This is where modernity based on capitalism, imposed on India through British colonialism and further developed by Indian oligarchs, has led us.

How can this be accepted as social progress? And if it is not, can it be called modern?

The same Europe which gave birth to capitalism, and which tried to establish private property all over the globe through colonialism, also gave rise to its negation in the form of socialism. It took the most powerful concrete shape in Russia as Bolshevism. After October 1917, a new experiment began which brought forth a new alternative to capitalist modernity. It built a society based on abolition of private property and the development of collective property and societal property. It also built a political system which was based on recognising rights on the basis of one's contribution to social labour, with "no room here for the shirk!" Egalitarianism, equal opportunity for all, education, health care and jobs for all, reduction of drudgery using technology, mass participation in cultural and sports activities and all other attributes that are associated with the word 'modernity' were achieved in this socialist society. This new socialist modernity inspired many a struggle all over the world.

After about two decades of this 'dictatorship of the disenfranchised', it was realised that the time had come to rise above a class based definition of democracy. There were attempts to remove one-sidedness by introducing equal political rights

for all, through a new constitution in 1936 that gave a greater role to the people directly in making public policy decisions, instead of the communist party arrogating to itself this right as its prerogative.

However, before these innovations could take deep root, a retrogression set in both in the internal and external policies of the Soviet Union. Eventually the system collapsed and the new elite embraced the old capitalist modernity. This was visible in its most naked form when the 'new oligarchs' grabbed huge chunks of Russia's state-owned industry and natural resources, with the rise of Yeltsin.

Today, Russia is home to 7 of the 25 richest people in the world, and 12 of the 25 richest in Europe. There are more billionaires living in Moscow, than in any other city in the world, with an average wealth of \$5.9 billion (Rs 25,370 crore each). Russia ranks second in the world in number of billionaires, with 87, behind America's 469, according to Forbes magazine.

At the end of the Cold War, the US, Western Europe and Gorbachev's USSR along with several other countries of Eastern Europe got together in Paris in November, 1990 and redefined modernity, which they described as a simple admixture of market economics and multi-party democracy. Signatories of the Paris Charter soon made their belligerence known to anyone who did not fully fall into line with this and who tried to experiment with their own *sui generis* systems!

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the debate on modernity has taken a new form. Now it is claimed that if you talk of socialism and collective property you are a fossil, but if you believe in neo-liberal market

economics and say puerile things like 'the business of the government is to not be in business' and so on, then you are a 'modern' individual.

What we are seeing in India after the Paris Charter is an Indian version of the same recipe of multi-party democracy and market economics in full bloom. In fact, on July 21 and 22 this year, the Indian parliament once again demonstrated on 24x7 TV, that market economics operates inside a multi-party parliament as well!

How do we get out of this cul-de-sac and truly modernise India?

I would argue that one needs to dispassionately study the experience of socialism and why it collapsed, in order to modernise the theory underlying a superior democracy and economic order. Here I do not at all mean 'socialist market economics' as some are proposing, since I think that would not be very different from neo-liberal market economics in the final analysis. What needs to be done is to study why socialism got alienated from the people whom it was supposed to belong to. How to unleash the human factor in governance and economic management, and in all aspects of life? How to harmonise the individual, collective and societal interests? How do we achieve this in the present rancor-

ous and highly polarised, sectarian atmosphere? Here it is worth examining our own traditions and learning from the rest of the world.

The traditional Indian ethos, according to some, did not talk about rights explicitly. Nevertheless, it integrated individual rights and duties and societal rights and duties in the concept of dharma, which is often narrowly and wrongly translated as religion. Moreover, the right to conscience and a mechanism to harmonise different viewpoints through *anekantavada* was upheld long ago, through beautiful philosophical and methodological constructs.

The right to conscience was upheld as the right to find one's own salvation through a self chosen belief system and a way of life that goes with it. This was not confined to spiritual matters, as expressed splendidly by the Bhakti movement, but included temporal matters as well. For example, a reading of the *Svetashvatara Upanishad* shows that in those days there were many theories about the origin of the universe: 1) *kala* (time), 2) *svabhava* (inherent nature), 3) *niyati* (fate), 4) *ydrachha* (accident), 5) *bhoota* (elements of matter), 6) *prakruti* (female principle, primeval matter), 7) *pura* (male principle, spirit). The author is in favour of the seventh theory but he does not condemn or ridicule the other six. Similarly, Kautilya in *Arthashastra* states in the very beginning the views of Manu's followers, Brihaspati's followers and then enunciates his own. There is respect for tradition but there is also assertion of his individuality.

The Indian method of discourse too was highly respectful of the 'other' view. A proponent would first put forward in the strongest possible terms the opponent's case, (*purva*

**In fact, on July 21 and 22
the Indian parliament once
again demonstrated on 24x7
TV, that market economics
operates inside a multi-party
parliament as well!**

paksha) and then go on to posit his views, (*siddhanta*) without rancour, ridicule and demagogic.

Liberal tolerance in the ‘modern civil society’ of the “other” is not even a shadow of the Indian approach. Tolerance hides animosity and condescension just below the surface and too often erupts in majority-minority polarisation. At best, it signifies a temporary co-existence due to circumstances, without mutual respect and necessarily without the basis for long term harmony.

The Indian ethos was steeped in humility and respect. Indians posited that truth reveals itself to the seeker and no seeker can claim to have a complete grasp of the truth. Thus, there would be many points of view which need to be integrated to get a total understanding of a phenomenon. The blind men and the elephant is an oft quoted parable in the Indian ‘*marga*’ (high brow) as well as ‘*desi*’ (folk) traditions. This was articulated in *anekantavada* and *shyadvada*. That is, truth has many facets and no one can claim a monopoly over it.

Anekantavada goes against absolutism and Aristotelean certainty and yes/no binary logic. Divisions like ‘them and us’, ‘with us or against us’, right or left, belong to capitalist modernity and the Cold War. Clearly the Indian approach leads to harmony, leads to an inclusive society and absorbs cultural and philosophical influences. It leads to a possibility of coming up with non partisan solutions to today’s complex problems.

The state’s *dharma* was to look after education, health care, tank and canal irrigation etc. In short, the *Rajadharma* was to provide *sukh* (prosperity) and *suraksha* (security from internal and external destabilisers). Even in the architecture of Harappan excavations, one sees that

as early as 3000 BC, Indians thought of individuals as born to society and not in a vacuum. That is expressed in well planned sanitation, grain storage silos, storm water drains etc – in short a societal level planning and execution and that too in all parts of the town, in elite quarters as well as the quarters of the commoners.

The right to conscience, in traditional India, thus becomes a natural reflection of reality, which can be viewed in many ways, unlike in Europe where it became a privilege granted by a sovereign. In the Indian approach to the right to conscience, the state has no role to play. Right to conscience is not a part of political balancing act but is a reflection of multifaceted nature of truth itself.

In modern India, a product of the colonial legacy, we have forgotten all this. The state grants the right to conscience through the Constitution and takes it away when it deems fit. Not only are anti-conversion laws passed in various states, but thousands have been incarcerated in the North East and Kashmir because they question the involuntary union of India or because they are considered fundamentalists in the ongoing ‘War against Terror’. Has this led to harmony and less strife?

Modern India has followed capitalist footsteps and increasingly believes in ‘each one for himself’ and ‘markets will decide’. It thereby abdicates societal dharma that an individual is born to society and society has an obligation to look after the individual and provide him opportunities to contribute productively.

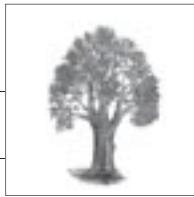
The caste system was a negation of the right to conscience and the right to knowledge, as well as of the duty of the state to provide *sukh* and *suraksha* to all. That is why the caste system constantly provoked rebellion

Along with the summing up of the experience of socialism in the former Soviet Union, Indians would greatly benefit by also getting rid of Macaulayan Eurocentric prejudices and studying our own tradition.

against itself from the very beginning. When it predominated, society stagnated and when the caste system was shaken up and overthrown, even if temporarily or locally, the society was rejuvenated.

Along with the summing up of the experience of socialism in the former Soviet Union, Indians would greatly benefit by also getting rid of Macaulayan Eurocentric prejudices and studying our own tradition. This is not to say that pre-British and pre-capitalist India is where we should be heading in the future. But we need to develop an alternative paradigm of modernity that not only promises an equitable, just, non hierarchical and caring society, but that also harmonises the relationship between mankind and the rest of nature as well as the individual, collective and the societal interests. In one word, there is a burning need to build a truly modern alternative to the highly unsatisfactory present, instead of being bound by various versions of capitalist modernity.

Shivanand Kanavi is a senior journalist and author of “Sand to Silicon: The amazing story of digital technology”■



Reconstructing the Past

A conversation with Ravindra Singh Bisht

Strangely, one rarely meets a historian and a field archaeologist who is also well versed in Sanskrit. **Ravindra Singh Bisht** is one of them. We met him at the Red Fort, in the Institute of Archaeology, run by the Archaeological Survey of India. He grew up in the hills of Kumaon and studied ancient Indian history at Nainital and Lucknow and trained as an archaeologist in the very same institute at the Red Fort. He then joined the Department of Archaeology and Museums of the Punjab government. Quite early in his career (1968-71), he was involved in excavations at Sanghol that led to the discovery of a site that extended from the late mature Harappan period to the modern. In 1971, he joined the new state of Haryana where he was involved with the important excavations at Banawali. Later he joined the Archaeological Survey of India and led the team that excavated at Dholavira, Kutch. He has written a large number of research papers on his findings. He is also one of the prominent archaeologists who dismiss the theory of the Aryan invasion of India and in fact sees Rigvedic Aryans as belonging to the late-mature Harappan period. From his school days, Bisht was fascinated by Sanskrit, though no one in his family had any knowledge of it. Today any conversation with him is sprinkled with generous quotations from the vast Sanskrit literature. **Shivanand** spoke to him about the mystery of Harappan culture, a sophisticated civilisation with no known literature on the one hand, and that of the vast Vedic literature with no archaeological evidence to locate its chronology and evolution.

Dr Bisht, welcome to Peepul ke Neeche. We are conversing in the midst of this awe-inspiring structure of the Red Fort and I hope we will discuss many mysteries of ancient Indian history.

Thank you. I am pleased to participate in this discussion. As for Red Fort, I am an alumnus of this very School of Archaeology where I learnt the elements of my trade in the sixties.

Tell us briefly about Harappan civilisation.

The history of this region starts from excavations in Mehrgarh, Baluchistan which have given us a continuous chronology of events of the last 9500 years. The Harap-

pan sites which today number more than a thousand lie in a large area: starting from the Makran coast of Baluchistan, in the West, Haryana in the East, Manda (Akhnoor) in J&K in the North to Lothal in Gujarat in the South. This area encompasses Sindh, both Punjabs, North Rajasthan, Haryana, Kutch, Saurashtra. Thus it extends into upper Ganga-Yamuna doab, the Tapti valley and the upper Godavari valley as well. The Harappans crossed the Hindu Kush and established trading posts at Shor Taghai in north Afghanistan as well. This is a vast area, which covers more than twice the size of the ancient civilisations of Egypt or Mesopotamia. Based on its level of development, this culture can be classified as

Early Harappan (3200-2500 BCE), Mature Harappan (2500-1900 BCE) and Late Harappan (1900-1500 BCE). Mature Harappan is the most advanced and one can see town planning, elegant architecture and seals. We also see a number of Harappan items in Central Asia, Mesopotamia, Iran, Oman, the Gulf and Afghanistan, indicating that mature Harappan culture had extensive contacts and trade with surrounding areas. Clearly they had overland and maritime trade. In the Late Harappan culture, you see the absence of cities and more village like settlements, indicating a retrogression.

The great mystery in Indian history is the existence on the

one hand of Harappan civilisation with no philosophy and decipherable literature, leaving aside seals with a few characters, which are yet to be read, and on the other hand this vast Vedic literature which does not seem to have any archaeology associated with it, if you accept the dating (1200 BCE) of the Rig Veda, arrived at by scholars like Max Muller and some historians. What is your view?

Max Muller was not an archaeologist and gave an ad hoc dating of 1200 BCE-600 BCE for Vedic literature based on some linguistic considerations. However, that seemed to have stuck as a dogma even though he himself tried to disown it! My own estimation is that Rig Veda belongs to Mature Harappan period 2500-1900 BCE. The geography described in Rig Veda does belong to the Saraswati-Indus valley. There are strong reasons to believe that the lost Saraswati is the Ghaggar-Hakra system, which presently flows from Himachal into Rajasthan and then disappears in the sands of Cholistan in Pakistan without joining the Arabian Sea. Satellite imagery has confirmed that this river system used to merge with the Arabian Sea. Tectonic movements resulting in earthquakes and the onset of a long phase of aridity sometime after 2000 BCE in addition to some anthropogenic factors might have led to change in hydrography and finally the river getting lost in Rajasthan. This could have happened sometime after 2000 BCE. Many Harappan sites of the later periods have been found in the dried up Saraswati valley. To call Rig Vedic Aryans as pastoral herdsmen is a total misinterpretation. In fact, there are many verses in Rig Veda describ-

ing agriculture and trade including maritime trade. There are detailed descriptions of three masted sailing ships; there are descriptions of fortified cities with three different parts which can be called the citadel, middle town and lower town (also found in Dholavira). There are hints of city life with its virtues and vices in the text. There are many linguistic and conceptual connections between *Rig Veda* and *Ahura Mazda* of *Zarathushtra* of Persia, the former however having chronological priority.

Harappan civilisation, with its uniformity in weights and common architectural and town planning features, indicates the existence of an ancient empire of some sorts. Whereas Rig Veda still talks of sabhas and samitis and an elected Raja. How do you reconcile the two?

It appears to me that Harappa would have been a socio-economic empire at best held together by a strong social ethos, economic order and community pride. Even if we think of a political entity, we know that in Indian history no empire could survive for more than 150-200 years. Thus, even if it came under one ruler, it would have been for a very short period of time. In fact all empires in India have not lasted more than that. Look at the Mauryas, Guptas, Mughals etc. That is, centrifugal tendencies take over after some time. But we still see so many features of culture and arts and economy which are geographically widespread in India. So it is not necessary to be in a single political empire for certain common features to exist. As for the Rig Vedic political system, the sabha was perhaps a house of elders, whereas the samiti had arti-

sans, farmers and the elite, that is different classes and professions, in it. Thus, stratification had already come into being. It would be romantic to call it republican and democratic. At best it was an oligarchy assisted by a set of diverse group of professionals in a samiti. However, Rig Veda remembers a lot of things from the past and retains some of the forms whereas the actual state of affairs had moved on.

There is no single mode of disposal of the dead in Rig Veda and that corresponds to what we see in Harappan culture as well. The weights system of dividing everything into 16 parts is common to both. But after that the decimals take over so we have dasha (ten), shata (hundred), sahasra (thousand), ayuta (lakh), niyuta (crore) and so on taking over.

In the Rig Veda we find various types of settlements as well as individual structures, both hinting at the existence of a kind of a plurality of types of settlements as well as a hierarchical order as we expect in an urban system to exist. In architecture there is mention of constructions having six pillars, hundred or thousand pillars, similarly hundred doors and thousand doors etc. So is the fort with seven gates, three divisions and three defences.

One of the problems discussed in the literature is the "Horse" not being Indian and an import from the steppes, whereas Vedic literature mentions the horse.

Significantly, there are references in Rig Veda to the fact that Indra fought successful wars even without the horse, anashvan or anarvan, and broke many forts asunder. Is it not pointing to a stage when there were no horses in the early Rig Vedic life? Moreover, the Harappans like the



Dholavira excavations show a high level of planning in hydraulics during the Mature Harappan period

Mesopotamians of the third millennium BCE, had harnessed onagers (wild asses) into chariots. Rig Veda was composed after the horse came to India. Moreover, there were different types of wild asses in India. Rhinos and elephants, were there and they have also been described in Vedic literature and picturised in seals. Similarly, there are questions raised about rath-chariot. But we have found terracotta toy wheels bearing spokes painted in black or white pigment or by way of embossing. Thus both Harappans and early Aryans had spoked wheels.

The Saraswati seems to have flowed strongly, roughly from 8000 BCE to 3000 BCE, when a large part of Asia was experiencing a very strong monsoonal regime. Around 3000 BCE, the monsoon stabilised to the phenomenon we see at present and therefore the Saraswati was still flowing. It was only after 2000 BCE that it might have come under progressive desiccation – a phenom-

emon noticed by the people of the latter Vedic period. It was an important river and hence revered in Rig Veda. Hence, in Yajurveda and Atharvaveda and the later compositions, Saraswati had already been deified as a goddess, while its riverine aspect is only rarely indicated.

What led to the downfall and disappearance of Harappans? Was it an Aryan invasion as mentioned in history texts?

Aridity seems to have led to regression and later migration of Harappans. There is no evidence of any invasion. In fact, the Aryan invasion theory is pretty untenable today. There are basically two periods which are significant archaeologically: the Neolithic culture of Mehrgarh that is eighth millennium BCE, and the chalcolithic (copper age) period in the fifth millennium BCE, when a new socio-economic order emerged in the North-Western part of the sub-continent. Continuity in change may

be seen all throughout the Harappan and post-Harappan periods. Only a few people trickled in from Central Asia in the second millennium BCE. They remained localised in the Gandhara region or the Kachi plain and some valleys in Baluchistan. They then disappeared without bringing about any social, economic, religious or cultural change in India.

It is possible that some people migrated in small numbers over a long period, but then by and large they remained marginal all through. Cultures of Gandhar and Pirak which represent alien influences are therefore from a later period but they were highly localised and did not influence any course of Indian history. There are many commonalities in the area of Central Asia, Iran and India before the Iron Age. Why not look for Aryans during the Copper-Bronze Age!

Dr. Bisht, you have given us a fascinating view of ancient India and that too one contrary to what most of us learnt in schools. It has been a pleasure talking to you.

It is my pleasure. One could talk endlessly about reconstructing ancient India. Unfortunately, the atmosphere in India has been vitiated by charges that anyone who disputes the Aryan invasion theory is a communalist, right reactionary or a chauvinist. And similarly the charges from the other side that all those who stick to theories of Max Muller, of an imported Vedic culture through invading Aryans, are Eurocentrics and 'Macaulay's children'. This precludes any dispassionate discussion. I do not think that there would be dispassionate reconsideration at least in my life time! ■



Events

Resonances

March from Bangladesh to Pakistan

On January 23, 2009, thousands of people will flag off a march for unity of the peoples of the subcontinent from Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh. Covering various districts of Bangladesh, they will march through different states of India before crossing over to Pakistan at Hussainiwala. They will then proceed to different towns of Pakistan. This was announced by the Convenor of the Bangladesh-Bharat-Pakistan Peoples' Forum (BBPPF), Shri Manik Samajdaar, following the meeting of the Forum in Kolkata on June 16, 2008.

According to Mr Samajdaar, while the Bangladesh leg of the programme was already finalised, a delegation of the BBPPF would be visiting Pakistan in October to finalise the Pakistan leg of the programme.

The BBPPF also has plans to pay homage at the grave of Begum Hazrat Mahal in Nepal during November. For this purpose, a tri-national delegation will be visiting Nepal.

A festive function in Kolkata marks Ghadar Jari Hai

Lok Raj Sangathan and Bangladesh-Bharat-Pakistan People's Forum (BBPPF) organised a beautiful function in Kolkata on June 15, 2008 based on the theme 'Ghadar

Jari Hai'. The function was held at the Moulali Yuva Kendra, in the heart of Kolkata city and carried on till late in the evening. It had the audience swaying to vibrant songs and dances from Bangladesh and various parts of Eastern and North Eastern India, and the strains of Sufi music from Pakistan.

Attractive posters announcing the programme could be seen in many prominent parts of the city for days in advance.

The programme was inaugurated by Debabrata Biswas, Chairman

of the Bangladesh Bharat Pakistan Peoples' Forum. Speaking about the common ties of history, heritage and culture amongst the peoples of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, he said that the great Ghadar of 1857 has an important place in this common heritage.

Ms. Sucharita (Communist Ghadar Party of India), held the attention of the audience for the next three hours, with a powerful and soul-stirring power point presentation entitled *Ghadar Jari Hai*. "Without getting rid of our colonial



Cultural presentation during Ghadar Jari Hai, Kolkata

Events

legacy, our struggle to become the masters of our destiny cannot advance. That is why we say – *Ghadar Jari Hai!*" were her concluding remarks.

This was followed by a discussion on the presentation, during which speakers from Bangladesh and India spoke at length about the colonial legacy and the lessons of the great Ghadar. This session was chaired by Mr. Ram Kishore, convenor of the UP chapter of BBPPF. The delegation from Bangladesh included prominent women trade union leaders and political and social activists from various fields. Ms. Lovely Yasmin, a woman trade unionist from Bangladesh elaborated on how people from both our countries face similar problems at the hands of our ruling classes. Rupan Chowdhry of SUCI, Mr. Bipas Basu

of AICCTU and Mr. Mehboob Alam, journalist and political activist, leader of the delegation of BBPPF from Bangladesh, were among others who spoke up against the colonial legacy.

Mr. Prakash Rao, spokesperson of the Communist Ghadar Party of India and convener of Lok Raj Sangathan, concluded the discussion. He welcomed the suggestions made by the various speakers and pointed out that ending the colonial legacy demands the participation and efforts of more and more people in the movement.

A spirited cultural programme followed. There was fusion music from Bengal, accompanied with songs portraying the joys, sorrows and aspirations of the working people. The cultural team from Bangladesh performed several group danc-

es using traditional folk as well as modern dance forms. They also sang songs to a vibrant beat. Popular sufi themes from Pakistan, rendered powerfully and full of emotion, had the audience enthralled.

In the concluding ceremony, Debabrata Biswas congratulated the cultural artistes, who were felicitated with flowers and scrolls of honour. Manik Samajdaar, convenor of BBPPF, delivered the vote of thanks. The programme ended with the powerful message that the unity of the peoples of our subcontinent must be strengthened, in order to eliminate the colonial legacy and work for a future in which we will become the masters of our destiny.

May 31, Programme of Teesra Swadhinta, Delhi

Hundreds of activists from different regions of India gathered at Jantar Mantar on May 31, 2008 to celebrate the Great Ghadar of 1857.

Coming from different organisations, they noted the sad fact that 61 years after independence there was still no memorial to the martyrs of 1857 or of the freedom struggle in the capital. What we had at India Gate was a memorial to the Indians who gave their lives for British rule. The participants in the program raised the demand that a memorial be erected in Delhi in honour of the martyrs of 1857.

Inauguration of Dr. Rahi Masoom Raza Academy of Literature

Writers, artistes, poets, cultural activists, social activists and other prominent intellectuals of Lucknow gathered at the Nirala Sabhaghār on May 18, 2008 to participate in the inauguration of the Dr. Rahi



Program of Teesra Swadhinta at Delhi

Masoom Raza Academy of Literature.

The inaugural speech of renowned Marxist critic Prof Kuwarpal Singh was read in his absence (because of ill health).

At this function, the learned participants discussed a host of issues that have plagued India since 1857. Prominent amongst them has been the communal question, leading to nothing less than the partition of the country.

Those who participated in this invigorating discussion, revolving around the work of Dr. Rahi Masoom Raza, included Dr. Kanji Abdul Sitar, renowned Urdu writer and former head of Urdu Dept of AMU, the editor of the Lucknow edition of *Hindustan*, and renowned Hindi writer Shri Navin Joshi, historian Shri Vibhuti Narayan Rai, Prof Ramesh Dikshit of the political science dept of Lucknow University, and Dr. Shriddha Singh of BHU Hindi Department.

President of the Academy, Dr. Girish Chandra, gave his presidential address. Many other writers and cultural workers from all across India addressed this seminar.

The programme was conducted by Prof Sabira Begum of the Russian language department of Lucknow University and Ram Kishore, Secretary of the Academy.

Role of Urdu in the 1857 Ghadar

Maulana Mohammed Ali Johar Foundation organised a seminar on May 10, 2008 on “the role of the Urdu language in the War of Independence of 1857” at Johar Foundation, Ameenabad, Lucknow.

Rizwan Faruqi inaugurated the Seminar. On this occasion, Dr. Masoodul Hassan Usmani said that

Urdu was a language that was capable of uniting the people and after 1857 the British conspired to undermine this language. The history of 1857 was also obscured so that the Indian people would not be able to come together to challenge the British rule.

Urdu's rich history encompasses many histories of the Ghadar of 1857. Urdu was a language that was capable of uniting the people and after 1857 the British conspired to undermine this language. The history of 1857 was also obscured so that the Indian people would not be able to come together to challenge the British rule. Unless the role of Urdu Madaris and Ullema is honestly assessed, 1857 and the subsequent history will be incomplete. The role of Urdu also did not end in 1857, but has continued in different forms and will continue in the future.

Prof Malikjada Manjoor Ahmed said that while the warriors of the War of Independence had to face a lot of difficulties, the writers and poets played the role of providing them with encouragement and enthusiasm. Chaudhuri Sharaffudin said that thousands were sent to the gallows and hundreds were sent to Kala Paani. Rahmat Lucknavi said that the poets imbued the people with a vision of freedom. In this con-

text, Mirza Ghalib also played an important role.

Advocate Ram said that in the 1857 struggle, Hindus and Muslims fought together and it is worth keeping this tradition alive. Maulana Yahya Momani (Joint Editor, Al Furqahn) said that the whole edifice of 1857 stood on the foundation of Urdu. 1857 and Urdu are related to each other like flesh and bones.

Rights activist Biju Nayak said that the Urdu language is the product of the Indian soil. During the colonial period, Eurocentric views were imposed on education, languages, culture, politics, economics and science. We need to develop the Indian thought material. Only by breaking with the colonial legacy will we be able to achieve true freedom. Secondly, referring to the main slogan of the 1857 Ghadar, “We are her masters, Hindostan is ours”, he said that this slogan shows the desire of the Indians to take their destiny in their own hands. The 1857 struggle was brutally crushed. To this date, Indians are struggling to put the slogan in practice. That is why we say Ghadar Jari Hai.

Dr. Pramod Kumar, professor of modern history said that the Kala Paani punishment was only started after 1857. However, an accurate list of all the people who were sent to Kala Paani has not been prepared.

Yaseem Haider, Rafat Saida Siddiqui, Saif Babar, Mansoor Parwana, Maulana Istefaul Hasan Nadvi, Aftab Asar Tandvi, Kunvar Khurshid Muhani, Mausoof Khan, Jamshed Rehman, Advocate M. S. Haseeb, Mohammed Rashid Hasiri, Sayyad Ahmed Kirmani also presented their views. In the end, Mohammed Waseem Siddiqui and Jamshed Kirmani thanked the participants. ■



Perspectives

Uttiramerur

Democratic Village Polity in Medieval Tamil Nadu

Empowerment is a buzzword nowadays. Archaeological finds in Uttiramerur, Tamil Nadu demonstrate that the people of the area fully participated in local governance in a lively fashion more than a thousand years ago, says T. S. Sankaran

Uttramerur is about 75 km south west of Chennai and about 30 km south of Kanchipuram. Though now a small town of about 25000 people, way back in 750 AD it must have been very small when the then Pallava ruler Nandivarman Pallavan gifted the village to about 1200 vedic Brahmins.

It was named Uttiramerur after Uttirameru which was the title that Nandivarman was given. The old name of the place was Chaturveda Mangalam. It was also known as Pancha varada Kshetra.

The village was laid out in a well planned way based on Vaishnavite Agamic texts. According to Dr. Nagaswamy, the well known former Director of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu, "placed on perfectly systematised vastu grid, the secular buildings, commercial centres, temples, cultivable lands and irrigational canals were distributed in an amazing accuracy that would stand out as a model for modern town planners."

A great renovation was done in 1013 AD by Rajendra Chola and again in 1520 AD during the reign of Krishnadeva Raya, the great Vijayanagar Emperor.

The fame of Uttiramerur today rests not on its architectural excel-

lence but on the stone inscriptions on the walls of its temples, inscriptions that were carved a millennium back. These reveal the democratic nature of the village polity, refreshingly modern and edifying.

According to Dr. Nagaswamy who has made detailed studies of these inscriptions and written about them, these can be classified under different headings as indicated below.

1. Levy of fines on wrongdoers: The village assembly could levy fines on wrongdoers and it was the responsibility of the elected members of the concerned sub-committee, their servants, village scribes and village guards to collect the fines. Failure to collect the fines in the same financial year would be punished.

2. Testing quality of gold: This function was the responsibility of the elected committee which included four members from the merchant community, two members from the military garrison and two members from oil-mongers. The elected members had to be tax payers. Once every three months, the members were required to go before the village assembly and swear that they had not committed any fraud in testing.

3. Appointment of professors:

For the vedic college, the qualification prescribed was mastery of the Vedas. The candidate had to be from outside the village as a local candidate, and if selected, was likely to take things easy. The appointment was to be for only three years and if the incumbent wanted to continue he had to undergo another test.

4. Protection of village tank: The committee elected for this purpose would be from non-members of the village assembly. Their term was for three years. Their functions included maintenance of the tank, irrigation, levy and collection of tank tax, and utilising the funds for tank maintenance which included silt clearance once a quarter.

5. Efficient election system: All the activities were performed by assigned committees which were elected. The candidates who stood for election had to be above 35 years of age and below 70 years of age, and be residents of the village, in addition to being taxpayers and persons of integrity. Anyone who failed to render proper accounts of his earlier responsibility was not only disqualified from contesting any future election but his relatives and collaborators also were banned for seven generations!

Continued on pg 29



Perspectives

Tirukkural

Tirukkural is one of the most important works of Ancient India. Padma Sankaran gives us a peep into this famed work

“வள்ளுவன் தன்னை உலகினுக்கே தந்து வான் புகழ் கொண்ட தமிழ்நாடு”

“By giving Tiruvalluvar to the world, Tamil Nadu has acquired unparalleled fame”, wrote the modern Tamil poet Bharathi, referring to Tiruvalluvar and his work *Tirukkural* written about two millennia ago. *Tirukkural* and Tiruvalluvar have become synonymous with the Tamil language and Tamil Nadu.

Tirukkural constitutes one of the most important literary works in Tamil. This classic was composed during the Sangam Period of literary achievements in Tamil, roughly between 500-200 BC. There are references to *Tirukkural* in two of the Tamil Epics, namely, Silappathikaram and Manimekalai which fall in the last period of the Sangam Era, said to be between 200 BC and 100 AD. *Tirukkural* is also believed to be the first work to focus on ethics, among the Buddhist-Jain literature of India.

During the Sangam Period, the Tamil society enjoyed high standards in art, culture and literature. This was largely due to the fact that the Tamil Country in this period enjoyed political independence. For example, the invasions of the great rulers of North India stopped well outside the northern boundary of the Tamil country. Iravatham Mahadevan, the well known scholar in Tamil epigraphy and Indus Valley script says, “Another noteworthy feature of ancient Tamil literacy was its popular or de-

mographic character, based as it was on the language of the people. Literacy seems to have been widespread in all regions of the Tamil country, both in urban and rural areas and encompassing within its reach all strata of the Tamil society”. The Tamil country of that age was also free of caste divisions. Instead, Tamil society was divided on an occupational basis, such as Arivar (scholars), Ulavar (farmers), Ayars (shepherds), Padayatchier (soldiers), Valayar (fishermen), Vedavar (hunters), Kannalars (smiths) and Pulayars (tanners). Land was classified on the basis of almost the modern ‘agro-climatic’ regions such as Kurinji (mountainous), Mullai (forest), Marudam (agricultural), Naithal (littoral) and Palai (desert and wasteland).

That Tiruvalluvar was born into such a secular society and wrote in such a milieu is evident from the total absence of reference to castes in *Tirukkural*. The concepts and precepts are universal in their scope and content and are as valid today as they were two millennia back. Its universality is such that the work is as relevant to the whole world as it is to the Tamil people. No wonder *Tirukkural* ranks with the Bible as one of the most widely translated pieces of literature.

Tiruvalluvar, the saint poet, and his wife Vasuki lived in Mylapore which is a part of modern Chennai. There are many stories about the absolute harmony in their marriage.

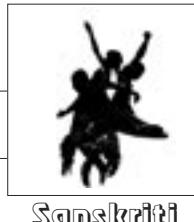


Tiruvalluvar, the saint poet

Tirukkural consists of 1330 Tamil couplets, organised into 133 chapters, covering a wide variety of themes and ideas, all grouped under three heads – Arathupal, book of Dharma, Porutpal, book of material wealth and Kamathupal, book of love and joy. Tiru means sacred, Kural means something short. The poet takes up a subject and allocates 10 couplets to it, and when all the 10 are taken together, a full comprehension of the subject is revealed. All 1330 couplets are examples of Venpa, a form of classical Tamil poetry. *Tirukkural* comes under a sub-category of Venpa called Kural Venpa, wherein each Kural has only two lines, the first line consisting of four words and the second line three. A set of well defined metric rules define the grammar for Venpa.

Each chapter in *Tirukkural* has a specific subject ranging from

Continued on pg 29



Theatre Review:

1857 Ek Safarnama - A Worm's Eye View

Nadira Zaheer Babbar and her team need to be congratulated for presenting a difficult subject and a problematic production in a simple elegant way, says Shiv-anand Kanavi

Director: Nadira Zaheer Babbar

Script: Varun S. Gautam

Research: Amresh Misra

Costumes: Bhanu Athaiya

Set and Light: Ashok Sagar Bhagat

Music: Kajal Ghosh

Actors: NSD Repertory Company

It is perhaps more difficult to bring in the panorama of 1857 than to depict the 18 days war in Kurukshetra. Primarily because of the spread in space and time of the former. Thus, it is natural that one gives up any attempt at completeness and focuses on one area. In this production the area chosen is mainly Awadh. Thus Wajid Ali Shah, the annexation of Awadh, the discontent among peasants, artisans and sepoys of the Bengal Army, and Nana Sahib of Bithoor and his lieutenants, Azeemullah Khan and Tatya Tope, occupy the centre stage. The stories of Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi or Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur or Moulvi Ahmed Shah of Faizabad and Mirza Moghul and Bakht Khan of Delhi and Bareily or even Begum Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow, are left aside. The last Moghul, Bahadur Shah Zafar himself appears only at the end.

Neither is the treachery of Scindia of Gwalior or the Sikh princes of Nabha, Jind, Kapurthala, Patiala and Faridkot mentioned. But what the play concentrates on is depicted admirably through good acting and script. Not to mention excellent sets and lighting, which despite being minimalist, make all scenes appear realistic and elegant.

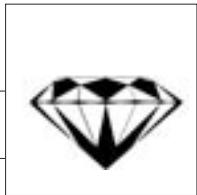
The distinguishing feature of the play of course is the Ghadar seen through the eyes of the peasant, sepoy, courtesan and the adivasi. A worm's eye view so to say, instead of the usual bird's eye view! Thus, shoulder to shoulder with the aristocracy are seen Ram Charan, a peasant from Awadh, Subedar Shamsuddin, a rebellious soldier of the Bengal Army, Azeezun, a courtesan of Awadh and Santhals, Mundas and other tribals. In fact, it is these characters that bring action, laughter, coquetry, heroism and pathos to the audience.

That the content strikes a chord with the audience was seen again and again in the show as scene after scene and several dialogues elicited spontaneous applause.

For an Indian audience what happened at Sati Chaura or Bibi Ghar in Kanpur where English men, women and children were

killed is not of great interest. The play puts them forward as a part of British machinations to inspire anger and patriotism in the European troops. However, true that may be, bringing out the facts about British atrocities of genocidal proportions in the Gangetic plains or the treachery of some Indian princes or the mature statecraft exhibited in the firmans of Bahadur Shah Zafar and Nana Sahib, would have added more value. In fact, showing the last moments of Bahadur Shah could have been easily dropped. There is also enthusiasm to show that Marx and Engels were commenting on the progress of the war in the New York Daily Tribune, a fact that could have been easily left out. Music and dance have been deftly woven into the play, making it very Indian but at times unnecessarily Bollywoodish.

The actors playing Wajid Ali Shah, Nana Sahib, Azeezun, Shamsuddin, Major Briggs and above all Ram Charan, stand out among the excellent ensemble cast. Except for a few blemishes mentioned above, Nadira Babbar and her team need to be congratulated for presenting a difficult subject and a problematic production in a simple elegant way. ■



Jewels of India

Sant Tukaram

The Great Poet of the Bhakti Movement

Girish Bhave introduces us to the life and work of the great Marathi Bhakti poet **Tukaram**, whose birth four hundred years ago is being celebrated this year

Tukoba, as he is fondly called by his followers, was born in 1608 and vanished without a trace in 1650. What little we know of his life is a reconstruction from his own autobiographical poems, the contemporary poetess Bahinabai's memoirs in verse, and the account of the latest biographer of Marathi poet-saints, Mahipati.

In his lifetime, Tukaram wrote more than 4500 poems, called Abhangas. One of the obvious reasons why Tukaram's life is shrouded in mystery and why his work has not been preserved in its original form is because he was born a Shudra, at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

Tukaram's family owned a comparatively large piece of prime agricultural land in Dehu. Several generations of Tukaram's ancestors had farmed this land and sold its produce as merchant-farmers. Though technically regarded as Shudras, they were by no means socially or culturally backward. Being traders by profession, they learned to read and write so as to maintain accounts of financial transactions. This was presumably the kind of education Tukaram received. The rest was his own learning from whatever sources he had access to.

The famine of 1629, during which he lost his wife, was a devastating experience for Tukaram. The horror of the human condition that Tuka-

ram speaks of comes from this experience. Some of his biographers have described how Tukoba, unable to bear the horrible condition of people due to famine, opened all his grain godowns for the people.

Just like other saints of the Bhakti movement before him, Tukoba challenged the rigid caste system. He preached that the caste system had nothing to do with religious beliefs and practices and that the people should not accept it. Tukoba said -

"Time will submit to slavery, from illusion's bonds we'll be free, everyone will be powerful and prosperous -- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra and Chandala all have rights, women, children, male and female and even prostitutes".

Just like Bhaktas before him, Tukoba also challenged the monopoly of Brahmins over knowledge, which was the basis of the relegation of other castes to inferior roles. Tukoba roared-

He who becomes enraged at the touch of a Mahar is no Brahmin.

There is no penance for him even by giving his life.

There is the taint of untouchability in him who will not touch a Chandal.

Tukaram says: *A man becomes what he is continually thinking of.*

He lashed out at Brahmins who use Vedas to commit all sorts of



Sant Tukaram's Image on a Stamp

atrocities on the masses and explained to people that the real merit of a person is determined not by his birth but by his deeds. His discourses focused on day-to-day behavior of human beings, and he emphasised that the true expression of religion was in a person's love for his fellow human beings rather than in ritualistic observance of religious orthodoxy, including mechanical study of the Vedas.

Tukoba said:

"Merit consists in doing good to others, sin in doing harm to others.

There is no other pair comparable to this.

Truth is the only religion (or freedom); untruth is bondage,

There is no secret like this. God's name on one's lips is itself salvation,

Disregard (of the name) know to be perdition.

Companionship of the good is the only heaven, studious indifference is hell.

Tukaram says: It is thus clear what is good and what is injurious; let people choose what they will."

Though he fought fearlessly against Brahmanism, he was not against Brahmins as such. That is why he attracted a huge number of

Brahmin devotees not only during his lifetime but to date.

Tukoba chose the language spoken by his people, Marathi, for his compositions. He believed that only by exchanging experiences amongst each other can the people enrich their understanding of life. For this it was essential to develop the language of the masses. Like other Bhaktas he made language a form of shared religion and religion a shared language. This tradition helped to bind the Marathas together against the Mughals.

“Words are the only jewels I possess

Words are the only clothes that I wear

Words are the only food that sustains my life

Words are the only wealth I distribute among people

Says Tuka witness the Word He is God

I worship Him with my Words”

The poetess Bahinabai, a contemporary and a devoted follower of Tukaram, has described how Tukaram, in a state of trance, chanted his poems while an enraptured audience rocked to their rhythm. The audience consisted of common village-folk, including women and low caste people, thrilled by the heights their own language scaled and stirred by the depths it touched. Bhakti poetry became a phenomenal movement bringing Marathi-speaking people together as never before. This poetry was sung and performed by audiences that joined poet-singers in a chorus. Bhajan was the new form of singing poetry together and emphasising its key elements by turning chosen lines into a refrain.

Tukaram speaks the Marathi of the common man of rural Maharashtra and not the elite. His

language is not something exclusively used by learned priests. It is the language of ordinary men such as farmers, traders, craftsmen, labourers and also the language of the average housewife. His idiom and imagery is moulded from the everyday experience of people though it also contains special information and insights from a variety of sources and contexts. That is why Tukoba's kirtans influenced millions of people during his times and even today.

For a Shudra like Tukaram to write poetry on religious themes in colloquial Marathi was a double encroachment on Brahmin monopoly. Although since the 13th century poet-saint Jnandev there had been a dissident Varkari tradition of using native Marathi language for religious self-expression, this had always been in the teeth of orthodox opposition. Tukaram's first offence was to write in Marathi. His second, and infinitely worse offence, was that he was born in a caste that had no right to religion, or for that matter to any opinion. Tukaram's writing of poetry on religious themes was seen by the orthodoxy of that time as an act of heresy, of defiance against the caste order.

His contribution to the Marathi language is so huge that he is acknowledged as the greatest Marathi poet ever. There is no other Marathi writer who has so deeply and widely influenced Marathi literary culture since Tukaram. His poetry has shaped the Marathi language. Many lines of his Abhangas are used in the colloquial & literary Marathi, regularly, as very popular ‘Sayings’, without realising that they are from his Abhangas.

Jyotiba Phule used to call him Peasant Saint and extensively used Tukoba's verses. Tukoba influenced

illiterate common masses as well as the most highly educated people. Agarkar, Ranade, Bhandarkar, More, Mardhekar, Sane Guruji ... the list is very long. Tilak's Geetara-hasya starts and ends with Tukoba's verse. Dr. Ambedkar chose Tukoba's Abhangas for his first paper for Dalits, called 'Mooknayak'. Tukoba's ideas also inspired Marathi poets who expressed understanding of Revolt and Revolution. One of them, famous Baburao Bagul, in one of his poems said:

*“Either give me my Gun
Or give me Tukoba's Veena
I will go from village to village...
And sing revolutionary songs on
this Veena”.*

Tukoba's ideas continue to inspire all those who are not happy with the state of affairs of our country and are looking to bring forth a revolutionary change.

The author Girish Bhave is an active member of Lok Raj Sangathan. After completing his postgraduation in Mechanical Engineering from IIT Bombay he has worked in several Indian and multinational companies in the manufacturing sector

For further reading:

Tukaram's Poetry - By

J.R.Ajgaonkar

Hechi Dan Dega Dewa (Marathi)

- By Ravindra Bhat

Missing for 350 years, Retracing the Legend of Tukaram - By Dilip Chitre

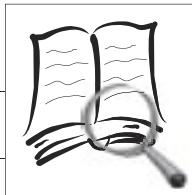
Tuka Says - By Dilip Chitre

Tukaram Maharaj & Mahatma Gandhi - By Sachin Parab

Manavi Jeewanacha Mahabhashyakar (Marathi) - By Sadanand More

Call Of The Martyrs - By Hardial Bains

Also see: www.tukaram.com



Book Review

Visionaries of 1857

Smita Pandey has drawn extensively from written communications of the time to show that the revolutionaries of 1857 were women and men of vision, says Prakash Rao

Vision of the Rebels during 1857: Aspects of Mobilisation, Organisation and Resistance
by Smita Pandey, Rupa & Co., 2008

The principal merit of this work on 1857 is that it draws extensively from written communications of the time — the correspondence amongst the revolutionaries, the reports appearing in contemporary newspapers, both British and Indian, as well as the correspondence within the British camp.

The author shows that the revolutionaries of 1857 were women and men with a revolutionary vision. Freedom from the rule of firangee looters and establishment of a Hindustan of Hindus and Muslims, were two running threads the writings of revolutionaries.

As Ms. Pandey points out, "The writings delineate a spacious and absorptive idea of Hindustan where the multi-religious and multi-farious castes and sects were all integrated and assured of the safety of their life, religion, honour, and property The first Constitution of independent India was drafted during the course of this Great War, the first modern manifestos — addressing each section of society...were promulgated

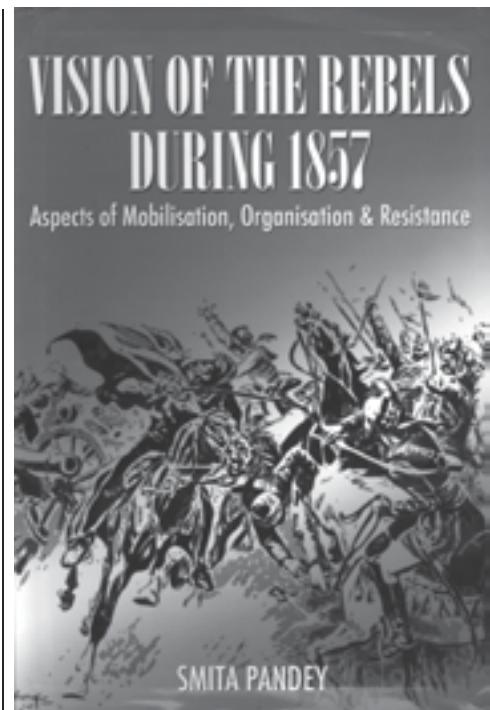
in this war, and the first Indian governments were set up in Delhi and Lucknow as a consequence of popular support."

The book emphasises that the revolutionaries had a clear political conception of the Hindustan they were fighting for, and repeatedly appealed to the Hindus and Muslims of Hindustan to oust the British and establish their own popular rule.

The revolutionaries propagated a new concept of religion. Smita Pandey refutes the jehadi connotations given to the uprising by Western historiographers. Being true to one's religion was no longer a question of adhering to some doctrines. It was given a new definition of being proactive in the struggle against the colonisers.

The writer has added to the recent information that shows that the flames of the 1857 Ghadar went far beyond the Awadh region, to the North East and the North West, as well as in the deep South beyond the Deccan.

Her research on communication amongst revolutionaries shows that it was not just through the Chapati and Lotus that the people were communicating with each other, but through indigenous language papers which were being secretly published, as well as

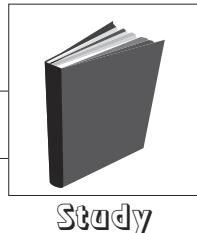


Cover of the Book by Smita Pandey

leaflets, posters, letters, and other publications.

To sum up, the book is a valuable contribution to bringing before the public the reality of the Great Ghadar.

Prakash Rao is spokesperson of the Communist Ghadar Party of India and the All India Convenor of Lok Raj Sangathan ■



Agrarian Relations during the Chola Period

This study by S. Raghavan of agrarian relations in a fertile region of South India about 1000 years ago assumes contemporary importance in the context of ongoing controversies over the acquisition of agricultural land for industry and other private businesses today. It is being serialised in two parts

Part I

When taking up any aspect of ancient Tamil history, most historians tend to look at the “pre-Aryan” or “Dravidian” influences and the “Aryan” influences as two separate and parallel trends, often contradicting and nullifying each other. However, in the light of several recent archaeological discoveries of Harappan remnants in Tamil Nadu and the growing evidence that the Aryans are not exogenous to India including South India, an attempt is made to look at all the developments during the Chola regime without colouring them as Aryan and Dravidian.

The Cholas re-emerged as a major power in south India around the 9th century AD. Over a period of two centuries they consolidated a system of rule that was extensive in its range of functions¹. The Chola state is believed to have had an elaborate administrative structure, which dealt with a large number of autonomous lower level political units such as the *mandala* (province), *valanadu* (district) and *nadu* (group of villages). There are plenty of recorded inscriptions to prove that both at the level of *nadu*

and at the individual village level, local and group assemblies were considerably active in the social and political life of the kingdom, especially in matters such as rural administration and justice.

There are differing opinions about characterising the overall nature of the Chola state. Some historians such as Nilakanta Sastri describe the Chola Empire as having a “Byzantine royalty” and liken South Indian villages to the Roman cities of Gaul². Others such as Burton Stein argue that the Chola state was a ‘segmentary’ state with its central, intermediate and peripheral zones, with further segmented internal divisions. According to this view, effective territorial sovereignty of the Cholas was confined to the fertile, prosperous core of the Cauvery Delta³.

The tradition of a strong local government and of active participation of the predominantly rural population in social and political matters was not a development of the Chola period alone. The merit of the Cholas was to strengthen these features and record them properly. Much earlier, in the period when the Pallavas reigned supreme from the end of the sixth

century AD, the basis for an agrarian economy had been laid. Large tracts of land were cleared and cultivation extended. Large-scale tank irrigation works were built. A land revenue system was developed. The income from land served to meet the expenses of the expanding state apparatus, the army and navy. The Pallava period saw the emergence of relatively autonomous organs of government at the level of villages.

The autonomous village level organs of power were of three types: the *ur*, was an assembly of all landholders in the village; the *sabha* was believed to be an exclusively Brahmin, or learned men’s assembly; and the *nagaram* consisted of local traders and merchants. Besides these, there are records of assemblies which cut across villages and were based on occupations, such as guilds of merchants, craftsmen and artisans. While there are numerous records of *sabhas*, since the Brahmin villages were centres of learning, it appears that all these organs were guided by the same rules and principles of governance, and the *ur* and *sabhas* carried out such functions as land control, irrigation, administra-

tion of justice and maintenance of records.

Starting from the Pallava period and extending into the Chola period, groups of Brahmins – presumably the more learned – were settled in so-called Brahmadeya villages. Whether the Brahmins took to education and became learned or the most educated and learned were considered as Brahmins is a topic being debated, but is outside the scope of this study. All that can be said is that these villages played a very central role in the administrative affairs of the empire. These villages were generally tax free but unlike the Special Economic Zones of today, these villages provided certain public services for the population in return for the waiver of tax. These villages served as centres of education and led the other villages in establishing norms and procedures, maintenance of records and documentation of village administration. Villages were important... constant and significant interaction with other institutions such as traders guilds and the revenue and irrigation departments of the empire. It is in this period of innovation that the bhakti movement also first emerged, led by the Vaishnavite Alwars and the Saivite Nayanmars. The movement attempted to remove caste barriers and increase the space for ordinary people in political and social life.

The Chola empire being vast, economic and social conditions and structures varied considerably from region to region. One part of the empire belonged to the irrigated agrarian ecotype, characterised by differentiation within the peasantry with big and small land holders and tillers. The second type of region was characterised by arid, semi dry and

dry ecotypes where the peasantry was relatively sturdier with little differentiation among them⁴.

As the Chola empire expanded, it is said that occupational divisions cutting across groups of villages strengthened. Broadly, there were two divisions, the Valangai or right hand castes (peasant castes) and the Idangai or left hand castes (artisan and trader castes).

Many historians have argued that private property expanded during the Chola empire. However, a close examination of property transactions shows that private property in the Chola empire had a very different meaning from the capitalist private property of today. Property relations were also very different from the ryotwari system that the British colonialists introduced in

vast areas of Tamil Nadu.

Ownership of property was in most cases common, land being owned by village communities and temples. The transfer and use of land were governed by strict rules. As U.N. Ghoshal points out, though the principle of royal ownership of all territory of the kingdom was recognised, the King's duty was to protect the land, and in return he had the right to a share in the produce of the land⁵.

The land was extremely productive and yielded a variety of crops. Among the major crops grown were paddy, wheat, barley, rice, millets, pulses, sugarcane, cotton, indigo, etc⁶. It has been documented that there were lands yielding three, two and single crops.

Land was measured and demar-



The Chola Macro Region

*This Map is not fit to scale

cated clearly in those days. Pallava records describe various kinds of measures. Boundaries were marked by stones and shrubbery. The entire cultivable land was periodically surveyed during the Chola period during the reign of Rajadhiraja I, Rajendra I and Kulottunga I. Persons who were unwilling to cultivate their lands and migrated, had their lands confiscated by the king, who granted them to others who undertook to cultivate them.

The foundation for the Cauvery basin, known as the “granary of south India” was laid by ensuring a good system of irrigation and regular cultivation. Canals from rivers were supplemented by irrigation tanks and wells. The sabhas played an important role in ensuring the regular removal of mud and silt from the beds of lakes. Both the Raja and the village sabhas had the responsibility to construct and maintain irrigation tanks. It was during the period of the Pallavas and Cholas that major irrigation works were attempted, a well-knit system of canals was established, and a system of irrigation tanks and wells in the rainfed areas put in place.

Lease tenancy was a common form of agricultural holding. Temple lands were leased out to tenants. Again the reader should be cautioned that this lease tenancy was very different from the lease tenancy system introduced by the colonialists and which continues until today, in which the tenant has no security of tenancy and is exploited to the bone by the landlord. The tenants in the Chola period had clear-cut rights and duties. They had the duty to maintain tanks. Where they took the initiative to repair tanks in disuse or bring jungle lands into cultivation, they were rewarded. The tax on land (called *melavaram* or *irai*) ranged from one-fifth of the produce for dry lands to one-third for wet

lands. Records show, that in the case of lands brought under cultivation by clearing jungles, the peasant had to pay a concessional tax of one-tenth in the first year, one-ninth in the second year and so on⁷.

Irai was a common term for land tax. There was tax-free land called *Irayili* and land which was taxed was called *Iraikattinilam*. Lands were further classified as *Nansei* (wetland), *Punsei* (dry land), *Nattam* (common) and *Thottam* (garden). Rate of revenue varied according to the nature of soil, crops raised and the capacity of the cultivator to pay the revenue. The land had to yield a certain minimum amount to be eligible for assessment. The assessment was generally non-permanent and varied from season to season depending on the yield. This situation prevailed until the British colonialists introduced the Permanent Settlement and established capitalistic private ownership of land; they introduced the Ryotwari and Zamindari systems in Tamil Nadu.

An interesting incident has been described by Rajalakshmi that at one point in time an assembly of all the *Desams*, including 78 *Nadus* of Cholamandalam, and 48,000 *Bhumis* was held to fix the schedule of taxes to be levied during the reign of the Cholas.

Though the King operated through revenue officials and tax intermediaries, reduction in taxes and remission of taxes were common. Tax exemption was granted to particular groups and institutions as a policy. Villages which served as centres of learning were tax-free. In every village, the residential part, i.e., the *Ur nattam*, washermen's quarters, temples, tanks, canals, etc. were exempt from all taxes. Fresh lands brought under cultivation generally enjoyed tax exemption to encourage extension of farming to new areas. Records

show that in the 14th year of Rajadhiraja II, reductions in the rate of rent were effected and the resolution to this effect was made in the village assembly⁸.

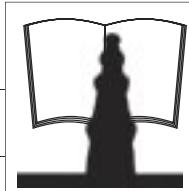
The agrarian revenue code that the Pallavas and Cholas established lasted more than a millennium, during which time agriculture and trade flourished. The British company annexed Tamil territory gradually, in the same way as it did the rest of India, employing devious stratagems and taking advantage of the fall of the Vijayanagara rule. With the establishment of Fort St. George in Madras in 1638, it spread its tentacles slowly, capturing the jagir of Chinglepet in 1792 and many other areas later. One of the first steps that the colonialists took was to change land relations and establish a land revenue system that would maximise revenues for the colonialists. The Permanent Settlement was implemented in the region with disastrous results. It was an extremely regressive step that set back agricultural development by many centuries.

S. Raghavan is a social activist interested in rights, economics and history

For further reading:

- 1 Tamil Nadu Economy: Performance and Issues, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Oxford & IBH, 1988
- 2 K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, The Colas, University of Madras, 1955
- 3 Burton Stein, Peasant state and society in medieval South India, OUP, 1999
- 4 Tamil Nadu Economy: Performance and Issues, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Oxford & IBH, 1988
- 5 U.N Ghoshal, A History of Indian Political Ideas, Oxford, 1966,
- 6 A. Appadorai: Economic Conditions of Southern India: (A.D. 1000-1500), Vol. I
- 7 R. Rajalakshmi, Tamil Polity (600-1300), Ennes Publications, 1983
- 8 Annual Report on Epigraphy, 133 of 1914

(To be continued) ■



Myth and Reality of Tipu Sultan

In the midst of distorted writings, Surkhraj Kaur and S. Udayan look for the true essence of Tipu Sultan

There is probably no Indian ruler who has been slandered and distorted by British historians as much as Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore in the late 18th century. The myth has been created that Tipu was a bloodthirsty and ruthless tyrant, a Muslim bigot who destroyed Hindu temples and oppressed Christians. Available documented evidence reveals that the reality is exactly opposite.

According to Wikipedia, "Sultan Fateh Ali Tipu, also known as the Tiger of Mysore (November 20, 1750, Devanahalli – May 4, 1799, Srirangapattana), was the first son of Haidar Ali by his second wife, Fatima or Fakhr-un-nissa ... Tipu Sultan was a learned man and an able soldier. He was reputed to be a good poet. He was a devout Muslim but the majority of his subjects were Hindus. At the request of the French, he built a church, the first in Mysore ... He helped his father Haidar Ali defeat the British in the Second Mysore War, and negotiated the Treaty of Mangalore with them. However, he was defeated in the Third Anglo-Mysore War and in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War by the combined forces of the English East India Company, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Mahratta Confederacy, and to a lesser extent, Travancore. Tipu Sultan died defending his capital Srirangapattana, on May 4, 1799."

One may question the authenticity and reliability of Wikipdeia. Fair enough! But in this case, the above

description is broadly in line with what the historical documents of the period have recorded. There may be a few discrepancies, such as the fact that the Mahratta Confederacy was part of the British led alliance in the Third Anglo-Mysore War but not in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War. But the character description matches available evidence. And his conscious martyrdom is an indisputable fact, no less heroic and inspiring than the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh. Tipu died defending the state of Mysore, and its fort at Srirangapattinam, with sword in hand.

The following quotations from Tipu's documented decrees, are illuminating and thought provoking:

"Looting a conquered enemy enriches a few, impoverishes the nation and dishonours the entire army. Wars must be linked to battlefields. Do not carry it to innocent civilians. Honour their women, respect their religion and protect their children and the infirm" from Tipu Sultan's decree in 1783, repeated in 1785, 1787 and possibly more often.

"To quarrel with our subjects is to war with ourselves. They are our shield and our Buckler; and it is they who furnish us with all things. Reserve the hostile strength of our Empire exclusively for its foreign enemies" – from Tipu's Code of Law and Conduct, 1787.

"Agriculture is the life blood of the nation. This land, rich and fertile, will reward those who work on



Portrait of Tipu Sultan

it. Famine and want are either the result of sloth and ignorance or of corruption. The 127 Regulations of this Revenue Code are intended for your immediate implementation. In particular, your urgent attention is drawn to the provisions which relate to cash advances to needy peasants for buying ploughs, steps for taking over derelict land and protection to the cultivator and his descendants.

... The Code is illustrative and not exhaustive. For instance, one Amildar has decided that where peasants are convicted of certain minor offences as are only punishable by fines, such fines can be commuted if the person charged with the fine agrees to plant two mango and two almond trees in front of the village, and water and tend them till they are the height of three feet. We approve of such meas-

ures. Thus, Amildars must rely on their ingenuity consistent with local conditions (but without ignoring the rights of the people) to stimulate agricultural growth. Any measures so introduced should be reported so that consideration can be given to their incorporation in the Code as also to reward the Amildars concerned.” – from Tipu Sultan’s circular to all Amildars, 1788.

“The Pharaohs built the Pyramids with the labour of their slaves. The entire route of the Great Wall of China is littered with the blood and bones of men and women forced to work under the whip and the lash of the slave drivers. Countless millions were enslaved and chained, and thousands upon thousands bled and died to make it possible that the magnificent structures of Imperial Rome, Babylon, Greece and Carthage should be built. ... And what is the tradition of this proud land which we call Hindostan? Its entire architecture, from the Taj Mahal of recent times to the ancient Sanchi Stupa of 2000 years ago, was built by free and devoted men. ... I mentioned this to you because I received a letter from the Governor of Malabar that in his province are excellent workmen whom he has put to work without payment on Government buildings. Knowing of my project to extend the Darya Daulat palace, he has offered them to me. To him I shall say that this Palace commissioned by my father with love shall not be sullied by labour forced from unwilling hands. I shall also order that for all their past work on public buildings, those workmen shall be paid and that henceforth none in my kingdom shall permit or order such forced labour.” – from Tipu Sultan’s address to the Council of Ministers in 1789.

“Anyone who brings under cultivation any uncultivated land and

grows crops, vegetables or fruits by irrigating it with water from this dam will be given all encouragement and concessions by the Khudadad Government ... the newly cultivated land shall belong to the cultivator and his descendants ... and no one shall dispossess him ...” – from Inscription on the foundation stone laid by Tipu Sultan for the dam on the river Cauvery, 1790.

Tipu was educated by two renowned teachers from a very early age – Maulvi Obedullah and Goverdhan Pandit. He studied both Hindu and Islamic scriptures and political treatises. As a result, Tipu developed an unusually broad intellectual vision and a deep curiosity and thirst for knowledge from all over the globe. He openly celebrated and officially saluted the victory of the American revolution against British colonialism, and its declaration of the ‘Rights of Man’.

Tipu was one of those rare Indian rulers of the 18th century who refused to enter into any deals with the British East India Company against another Indian ruler. The Nizam of Hyderabad allied with the British against Tipu, and even the Marathas were persuaded to do so in the Third Anglo-Mysore war. But Tipu told the Marathas: you are not our enemy, our common enemy is the foreign invader and occupying force represented by the British East India Company. The Marathas learned their lesson, and refused to join the last war waged by the Company against Mysore, which culminated in Tipu’s martyrdom.

Weakened after a joint assault by the British, in alliance with the Nizam and the Marathas, followed by a demeaning peace agreement that weakened Mysore, Tipu introduced policies of austerity by the elite, as part of regenerating productive activ-

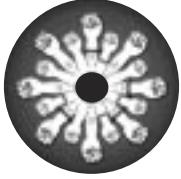
ity and restoring living standards of the working population. While winning over the hearts and minds of the majority of his people, Tipu seems to have lost the support of several members of his own ruling establishment. While Tipu ordered them to cut down their consumption and adhere to more modest ways, the British offered them fat bribes in return for treachery. Treachery of his own officers brought about Tipu’s downfall in the end.

He was called the Tiger of Mysore. He had the image of a tiger on his flag. Tipu's Tiger, an automation representing a tiger attacking a European soldier, made for Tipu Sultan, is on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. During Tipu Sultan's reign, a new calendar, new coinage, and seven new government departments were introduced, and several innovations in the use of rocket artillery.

At a certain stage in the final assault on Mysore, Tipu knew that defeat was certain. Escaping from his fort was possible. Yet he consciously chose to remain, thinking that his martyrdom would inspire others in the future to fight uncompromisingly against the British colonialists. He was proved right by the Vellore rebels who took it upon themselves to rescue Tipu's sons, who had been imprisoned by the British. Tipu's example continued to inspire countless Indian patriots, in 1857 and later during the anti-colonial struggle. His story deserves to be told truthfully to all Indians, and included in school curricula.

S. Udayan is a researcher and writer on political and economic issues.

Surkhraj Kaur is a student of History and a member of the Ghadar Jari Hai production team. ■



Ghadar Jari Hai

Seek the Truth!

“The 21st century belongs to India” – such a dream is enticing many Indians. But there are too many nagging doubts about the realism of such a prospect. How can India blossom if over half our population continues to be poor and miserable, with millions under-nourished and driven to early death? How can we embrace the future if so many regions and so many people are left behind or go from bad to worse even as the national income or GDP races ahead? Ours is an ancient land and civilisation, and we have inherited a rich body of thought material from our past.

Our forefathers gave the concept of zero to the world. Bordered by the Himalayas, the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, this sub-continent has had a long and rich experience with philosophy and theories of economy and statecraft. However, we suffer from the colonial legacy of negating our heritage. The leaders of independent India in 1947 chose to retain the foundations of the British Indian state and the colonial notion of trusteeship. They chose not to make a break with the past, but to prolong its life. The perpetuation of European institutions and concepts of peace, order and good government, complemented by the so-called free market reforms in the present period, has led to an acute and deepening crisis of values in Indian society.

The times are calling on enlightened Indian minds to make a clean break with the colonial legacy and with all forms of backwardness from the past. The need of the hour is to elaborate and develop modern Indian thought – philosophy, political and economic theory – so as to address the problem that stares us in the face. This is the problem of ending the arbitrariness of power and the colonial style plunder in new and varied forms. It is the problem of redefining the foundations and reconstituting the structure of the Indian polity and economy, based on modern Indian thought and consistent with the most advanced scientific knowledge internationally. This magazine, called Ghadar Jari Hai, is dedicated to this call of the times.

The struggle is alive for the Navnirman or reconstitution of India – on the basis of a modern definition of democracy, and the principle that the State is duty bound to ensure prosperity and protection for all. A prosperous future requires us to overcome the poverty of material conditions as well as the poverty of thought in command of social life. This magazine is a forum for advancing the struggle in the realm of ideas, which is linked closely with the struggle to open the door to progress for Indian society. The inaugural issue was devoted to the lessons of the Ghadar of 1857, in honour of the 150th anniversary of that historic milestone in the political life of South Asia.

We seek your support for this magazine. Just acknowledging your support after reading the magazine through a simple post card will itself be a shot in the arm for all of us who are pursuing this mission. Your subscription will be a clear vote of confidence and will add to our resolve to persist in this exciting task.

Subscription Invoice

Rates:

Subscription Period	Individual	Institutional	Overseas
1 year (4 issues)	150/-	250/-	USD 80
2 years (8 issues)	300/-	500/-	USD 160
3 years (12 issues)	450/-	750/-	USD 240
Life subscription	1000/-	3000/-	USD 500
Single issue			USD 20

Yes ... I would like to subscribe to Ghadar Jari Hai

Please tick 1 Year 2 Years 3 Years Life

Hindi English

Individual subscription Institutional subscription

Name: _____

Designation: _____

Organisation: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ PIN Code: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Address for Delivery (if different) _____

City: _____ State: _____ PIN Code: _____

Payment Details: Cheque / DD No. _____ Dated: _____

Drawn on: _____ Branch: _____

For Rs.: _____

In favour of Lok Awaz Publishers and Distributors, payable at New Delhi
(please add Rs. 25 for outstation cheque).

Lok Awaz Publishers and Distributors, E-392, Sanjay Colony, Okhla Phase-II,

New Delhi- 110 020, Email: mail.lokawaz@yahoo.com, Tel: +91 11 2028 1990

Uttiramerur...continued from pg 16

Elected persons could be recalled at any time if they did not discharge their duties properly. Once elected, a person could not stand for the next three consecutive elections. One could contest only for three terms altogether. Each serving member was debarred from standing for election to any other committee.

The actual voting in these elections was through the voter writing the name of his candidate on the "ballot paper" and dropping it in a large vessel. After all the voters

had voted, the ballot papers were taken out one by one and the name of the candidate read out loudly to the villagers. The persons who got the largest number of votes were declared elected to the concerned committee.

Are we not amazed at the sophisticated way in which the people of Uttiramerur organised their functions, over a thousand years back? All that we now talk of, such as empowerment of the people, enabling people to take part in civic functions

by standing for and getting elected to various committees, right of recall and so on, had been thought of and provided for! Knowing this, all of us must feel proud and at the same time humble.

Shri T S Sankaran, retired Additional Secretary, Ministry of Labour, is an authority on labour issues, a well-known rights activist and President of Jaishankar Memorial Centre■

Tirukkural...continued from pg 17

"ploughing a piece of land" to "ruling a country". On the subject of politics and governance the poet explains the relationship between the ruler, his ministers and his subjects, what should be the qualities of a ruler and his ministers, etc. Some of the subjects he covers are medicine, learning, farming and social service. Learning, he says, is useless unless passed on to others. In short the saint is able to put forward a guide to life at home

and in the community. A few excerpts for example:

கற்க கசடங்க கற்பவை; கற்றபின் நிற்க அதற்குத் தக.

Which means, learn thoroughly whatever you are learning; after that act according to that learning.

குடிதழிஇக் கோலோச்சும் மாநில மன்னன் அடிதழிஇ நிற்கும் உலகு.

This means, a king who rules according to the wishes of his subjects

will have the support of the people.

வெறுவந்த செய்தொழுகும் வெங்கோலன் ஆயின் ஒருவந்தமிடு ஒல்லைக் கெடும்.

If a king's rule brings hardships to his people, his rule will end soon.

Smt Padma Sankaran is a spirited social activist, campaigning for the rights of women and other disadvantaged sections of people.■

Ghadar Jari Hai

Website Launch

On September 7, 2008



For further information write to: jaarihai@yahoo.co.in

The Temple and the Body

*The rich
will make temples for Siva
What shall I,
a poor man do?*

*My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine,
the head a cupola
of gold.*

*Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,
things standing shall fall,
but the moving ever shall stay.*

The Original Poem in Kannada

ಉದ್ದವರು ಕಿವಾಲಯವ ಮಾಡುವರು : ಸಾನೇನೆ ಮಾಡುವೆ ?
ಬದವನಯ್ಯಾ. ಎನ್ನ ಶಾಲೇ ಶಂಭು, ದೇಹವೇ ದೇಗುಲ, ನಿರ್ಮಾಣ
ಕಳಸವಯ್ಯಾ. ಕೂಡಲಸಂಗಮದೇವ, ಚೇಷಯ್ಯಾ : ಸ್ಥಾವರಕ್ಕು ಉಪುಂಟು,
ಜಂಗಮಕ್ಕು ಇವಿಲ್ಲ !

Basavanna

Basavanna was one of the leaders of the 12th Century Bhakti movement, Virasaivism, of which the Kannada "Vachanas" are the most important texts. "Vachanas" or poems are typical expressions possessing an appeal which is timeless and universal. They mirror the urge to bypass tradition and ritual, to question authority and to express kinship with all living things in moving terms. This poem characterises this protest movement.